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Bandiera Rossa

• Leonard Tushmet

At fifty Danny Leary had the air of youth. The air, and not much else, unless the lyric baritone, a shade huskier than when he was in his twenties, could be counted as part of youth. Gray at the tonsural fringe left of his originally black hair, paunchy from too much rich food and florid from too much whiskey, Danny nevertheless carried himself and looked to his friends like the enthusiastic Irishman who had given them goose pimples when he sang "Joe Hill" or brought them to their feet when he led off the "Internationale" at mass meetings.

Danny's friends were not those who had helped pay his way through college by hiring him to sing "Ave Maria" at weddings and "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" on other festive occasions. They were the old-timers, the ex-Party people and sympathizers who now lived comfortably in suburban Homestead but who still remembered with fondness the rosy stormy Depression days when they sold *The Daily Worker* and gave out leaflets and collected money for the Scottsboro boys and Spanish War Relief. Danny had always been in demand at parties to raise money; his voice and his repertory of working class songs (the foreign ones learned phonetically) almost guaranteed success. Everyone, especially girls, was attracted to him. He made more or less permanent attachments; his first marriage ended in divorce on the grounds of incompatibility (his wife became a Trotskyite); his second wife left him because of her unwillingness to blink at his one-night stands, often the climax of a fund-raising party.

Now, thirty years later, the parties continued, for social, not financial, reasons but Danny was still a welcome guest. No hostess had to worry about entertainment when Danny was present. After a few drinks he would go to the piano and start off with an old and safe stand-by like "Kevin Barry" and go on, depending on the ethnic make-up or the political leanings of the company, to "*Die Moorsoldaten*" and "*Die Gedanken sind Frei*" or to "*Rozhinkes und Mandeln*" and "*Zog nit Keynmol.*" Then he would begin "Hold the Fort" and urged everyone to join in the singing. In a little while the dullest group would be lively, the stodgiest crowd would be singing "Solidarity Forever." As the evening wore on and as he became more intoxicated with the music (and the drinks), the songs became more radical and more nostalgic until they reached a peak in his own special song. He would crash a chord and boom out:

Avanti populo! A la rescossa!
Bandiera Rossa! Bandiera rossa!

Hardened liberals and staunch Democrats could not resist joining in the chorus:

Bandiera rossa trionfera!
Bandiera rossa trionfera!
Bandiera rossa trionfera!
Evvivo communismo é liberta!

At the end the guests would look at each other, laugh a little shamefacedly, and the talk would start.

Danny was an institution in the modern ranch houses and spacious Georgian residences in the hills of Homestead. In the sport jacket and slacks and tieless checked shirt he habitually wore, he was the symbol of youth to his hosts. They said, "Danny, you never grow older." They meant what they said; to them he was the same Danny Leary they had known in the Ironbound Club of the Party. And because Danny was their contemporary, they perforce felt younger when they saw him, regardless of their children in college or their grandchildren.

The young people called him Uncle Danny, and were openly respectful to him as befitted his senior status. Behind their hands they snickered at their parents' friend, an old man unwilling to accept the fading of his green years. They recognized (as Danny did not) that his singing of "We Shall Overcome" instead of "Lenin is Our Leader" was an attempt on his part to keep up with the times, that he would have preferred singing the *Warsawianka* rather than "*Havah Negilah.*"

One evening Danny dropped in for a visit with the Kleins. Marty, their oldest son, home from college for the Easter vacation, was entertaining some friends in the recreation room downstairs. Danny had a martini with the Kleins and sat with them talking about the latest news from Red China and the resurgence of Neo-Nazism in Germany. Marty came up for more sandwiches and left the door to the recreation room open. Sam Klein noted how Danny's ears perked up when he heard the guitars strumming and the singing. He asked Marty, "May we join you?" and was answered with "Sure, why not?"

The Kleins and Danny sat on the bottom steps. About a dozen boys and girls were gathered around two long-haired guitarists who were taking turns singing nasally plaintive pseudo-Appalachian love songs. After a few of them came "Why Can't We Get Together?" and "The Draft-Dodger's Rag." Danny listened intently, and whispered to Sam, "Are these kids political?"

Sam shrugged. "What young kids aren't, these days? It's the New Left, they call it. What's Left about it I don't know. At least in our day we knew where we were going. We were positive. But these kids are all negative, plain anarchists, against everything."

When *Wimoweh* started, Danny quickly caught on and joined in the chant. His voice, better than the untrained unmusical incoordination of the others', took over. Several girls turned around to see the newcomer, and asked for more. Pleased, Danny sang "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd" and went on, after a little urging, to "Which Side Are You On?" No one (other than the senior Kleins) knew the words but the guitarists faked an accompaniment and the group hummed along. Encouraged, and considering that the New Left was still Left, Danny sang one of his favorites, a song that showed the full range of his voice to good advantage:

> Fly higher and higher and higher!
> Our emblem is the Soviet star,
> And every propeller is roaring
> 'Red Front!'
> Defending the U.S.S.R.

There was silence when he stopped

instead of the expected applause. Then a swarthy bearded boy in sandals and dungarees called out, "You reached into the bottom of the bag for that one, Daddy-O!" One of the guitarists, egged on by a girl in a classic sweater and skirt, stood up and said, "Fellows, I know another version. It's called the United Front song." He struck a chord and sang:

Fly higher and higher and higher!
Our emblem is da-dah da da,
And every propeller is roaring
'Da-dah!'
Defending the Da-dah da da!

The crowd roared and applauded wildly.

The Kleins tugged at Danny's sleeve as he got up, red-faced at their mockery, and bellowed, "Very funny! Let me tell you something. Before you got out of diapers the Soviet Union was building Socialism! And don't forget it was the Red Army under Stalin that beat Hitler!"

He was interrupted by boos and a wave of laughter. Cries came of "Hooray! A Communist! . . . A Stalinoid! The last of the Mohicans! . . . Dad, O Dad! . . . Quick, a soapbox!" Marty, furious, motioned to his parents. They took Danny's arms and made him go upstairs, where they tried to pacify him with another drink.

Danny's anger quickly dissipated. He grinned, "Sorry I made such a scene. But those kids! They think they know everything! All right, we made mistakes. I admit it. So do you. That's why they feel so superior, but what makes them think they've got the answers?" He chuckled. "For a minute I thought I was back in Belmont Avenue arguing with a bunch of patriotic hecklers." He went on, reminiscing about the good old days when he and the Kleins and the Johnsons and the Pilutas were trying to organize a branch of the League against War and Fascism in the Third Ward. "Boy, were we stupid! You've got to agree we did a lot of dumb things. But anyway, looking back, wasn't it fun?"

Marty came up with another young man and told Danny, "Uncle Danny, the fellows were just fooling around. Don't take them seriously. They're all okay. It's just that—" He stopped, afraid lest saying Danny's choice of songs showed moss-grown conservatism might precipitate another argument.

His companion finished for him. "Sir, some of the fellows haven't any sense. I want to apologize for them, sir. They weren't trying to mock you, sir, but they got carried away, so I hope you won't take offense, sir."

Danny waved his hand. "That's a lot of sirs. I'm not *that* old. Don't worry, boys. I'm not offended. I've been in tight spots before." He shook hands with both of them. "Forget it."

To the senior Kleins he said, after Marty and his friend had gone downstairs again, "Those kids are basically all right but they've been brainwashed. They don't know the facts of life. They're floundering. That's why they're so against everything. What they need is someone to guide them."

Sam shook his head. "But not us, Danny. They don't trust us. They pity us for thinking we could accomplish anything by orthodox politics. And you know, sometimes I think they're right. We sure made no headway."

"What do you mean?" Danny was horrified. "The Negro movement, the opposition to the war in Vietnam, Snick, Core—don't you think we laid the groundwork, the intellectual back-

ground for all of them."

"Well," Sam replied, "maybe we did, but the young people don't see it that way. It's late and Marty's got his friends here, but you ought to talk to him sometime. He's got a different point of view."

Danny looked at his watch, "It *is* late, and tomorrow's a working day. I have to go. But I'm going to call Marty. I don't agree with you. Sometimes an older and wiser head can help the kids." He thanked the Kleins for their hospitality and left.

Danny made no effort to call Marty. For the first time in years he had been brought face to face with the fact that another generation had arisen, one that knew not Joseph nor the merits of the organized radicalism of the past, one that was skeptical of the achievements of the Soviet Union. He had presumed that the campus demonstrations and marches had not developed spontaneously but were the result of carefully planned work by the present-day equivalents of the Young Communist League, or at least of the Yipsels. That it was not so was disturbing to him, and unsettling because he foresaw that without direction the young people, the very ones in the forefront of the fight for civil rights and peace, were doomed to repeat the errors of their elders. An Old Believer, and uncomfortably conscious that he had been talking and not doing for years, he threw himself into the task of learning as much as he could about the new activity among the youth. He read their publications, he attended several local gatherings, sitting quietly in the rear of the hall, wincing at their lack of discipline in the conduct of the meetings and the vagueness of their goals. He felt, at the end of two months, he was ready to bore from within, to become the apostle to the youth. He had no doubt he would be successful. Was he not himself a young man, close to them in spirit if not in age?

He had taken note of their wariness, their suspicion of the the motives of older persons who tried to help. His approach would have to be indirect. The best way, he decided, to become influential was to become needed, and what better way for that than to use his voice at parties, just as in the past? He read about a party to raise funds for the defense of sit-inners arrested at a welfare office. That was where he would start.

The party was in an apartment on the tenth floor of the Chelsea Hotel in New York City. On the way in the bus from New Jersey, Danny chuckled to himself at the thought that this would be like an out-of-town tryout for a play. If all went well, he'd be in; if not, nothing would be lost and another tactic could be tried. He read the plaques to Dylan Thomas, Thomas Wolfe, and Brendan Behan affixed to the pillars outside the hotel, concluded that there would be a literary crowd, making his job easier, and entered. He noted with condescending amusement the framed collage of silvered pocket combs and the formless splashes that decorated the walls of the lobby. We did the same things, he thought, but in a different way. We made giant posters of the fat capitalist standing on the oppressed muscular worker.

He was at ease with his companions in the slowly ascending elevator. He recognized that the girl in the black leotard and miniskirt and the boys in tight jeans and T-shirts were merely wearing costumes to indicate that they belonged, just as in the Thirties the girls wore cotton stock-

ings instead of silk and the boys wore woolen ties. If only they didn't have beards, or gave up the dark glasses, or cut their hair, he thought. The way they look makes a bad impression on workers. How can you convert the masses if you go around looking like a beatnik?

As soon as he opened the door of the apartment at the end of the corridor, Danny relaxed and smiled. The years of war and affluence dropped away. He was back home. Everything was familiar. The bridge table at the door for the dollar admission, presided over by a little blond girl with a worried look and a cigar box for making change. The smoke. The noise. The groups of young men and women standing talking, with drinks in their hands. The improvised bar at the far end of the room. The phonograph playing, listened to only by a sad-looking boy. The chair-sitters with fixed smiles, too sober as yet or too gauche to join the others. The gesticulating shouters, trying to persuade by decibels instead of logic. The sneerers, drifting from the fringes of one group to another. It was all here again, and Danny knew what was needed to bring them together into one coherent mass ready to listen to the speaker and contribute to the collection.

He made his way to the bar and had a drink. There were differences, it was true, from the old days. The bartender was a thin, bearded Negro in a beret. There were no pictures of southern sharecroppers or striking workers; instead, metal signs reading DANGER—DEMOLITION, MEN AT WORK, CHILDREN CROSSING covered one wall, and on the other was a crudely drawn mural of the Washington Arch before which stood priapic figures surmounted by cut-out heads of Johnson, Goldwater, Nixon, Stevenson, Humphrey, the Kennedys, and McNamara. Pizza was being served instead of sandwiches, and the raffle was for a tiny abstract wire sculpture instead of for a woodcut print. But on the whole, Danny thought, the resemblances outnumbered the differences, and he bought another drink.

The host, a harried, unshaven young man in a black sweater and corduroy pants, greeted him. "Glad to have you. Our entertainment is a little late but she'll be here soon." Danny smiled. How often had he heard the same excuse and how often had he obliged by filling in until the speaker came. Late entertainment meant none at all.

More people came. The apartment was crowded. The air of expectancy gave way to restlessness. Danny knew from experience that soon couples would begin to leave. Something had to be done quickly to keep the party going. He asked the bartender, "Anybody here got a guitar?" "Must be a dozen," the bartender replied, and called out, "Hank! Ellen! Bring your boxes here! Fella wantsa sing!"

Three boys, guitars at the ready, shouldered their way over to the bar near Danny, and started to tune up. Just as Danny had figured, a semicircle formed and people began to sit down on the floor facing him. Danny said to the guitarist, "Let's start with 'We Shall Overcome.'" They nodded. The room became quiet as they played the introduction.

Danny's voice rang out. His listeners locked arms and rocked with him in the chorus. When he finished, there was loud applause, except from the bartender who said, "Man, you sing all right but I don't go for that non-violence stuff." Danny shrugged

and sang "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and after that, without accompaniment, "The Man that Waters the Workers' Beer." The applause was louder. Calls came for other songs. Danny gulped down another whiskey and held up his hand. "I don't know half of those you're asking for, but I'll sing 'Good Night, Irene' if you'll sing along with me."

Two more songs followed. Danny saw the host threading his way through the crowd, followed by a tall carefully dressed Negro with a clerical collar. Danny felt pleased with himself for having done a good job. He waved to his audience. "That's all! More later! Now there's someing more important," and he sat down alongside the bar.

His host shook his hand and said, "Thanks. You saved the situation."

While the speaker outlined the facts of the case and the necessity for support, Danny's mind wandered. He listened with half an ear; he thought of the many parties in the past he'd rescued from failure, and of the many there'd be in the future. He resolved to give up the purely social functions in Homestead and get back to being an activist, or at least a helper of activists. Tonight was a proof that he was needed. He drank steadily throughout the speech and the collection. He felt he had to do his duty—the money was going for a good cause. He was well befuddled when the host turned to him and asked whether he'd lead more singing. He smiled fatuously and answered, "Glad to."

Swaying slightly, he led off with "Down by the Riverside" and then sang solo "Johnny, I Hardly Knew You." Without waiting he went right on with "Kevin Barry." A few people got up and stretched. Danny paid no attention and began to sing "Casey Jones." There was more moving around. The guitarists put away their instruments. The bar got busy, and Danny was slowly pushed away into a corner of the room, still singing. By the time he reached the fourth verse, only a couple of boys were listening.

"Can't you shut him up?" came a call from the other side of the room.

Danny spat. "Must be an F.B.I. man," and with clenched fist high in the air sang the "Internationale," first in English, then in French. With "*C'est la lutte finale,*" he was again the center of attention, but this time as a butt. His hearers had found a source of fun in the singing drunk and they made the most of it. They urged him on. "How about another? And another?" Some one passed up a tumbler full of whiskey. Danny drank it and began his old repertory. "Bankers and Bosses," "The Red Flag," "Whirlwinds of Danger" all were applauded.

"This guy's a comedian! . . . No, he's from C.I.A. . . . Where'd he dig all those up? . . . Who'd he come with?" The clamor reached through the clouds in Danny's head. He realized that he had drunk too much and was getting giddy. He also noted the displeasure on the host's face. It was time for the grand finale. He roared out

Avanti populo! A la rescossa!
Bandiera rossa! Bandiera rossa!

and when he came to "*Evvivo communismo é liberta!*" he felt hands behind him edging him to the door.

He started to struggle. "Is this the way to treat a comrade?" he asked. Two husky men held him firmly, took him down the elevator and out into the street, where they left him with a

"So long, pal! Remember the Alamo!"

The air cleared his head a little. He straightened up and walked carefully to the corner. He stopped and looked up and down the avenue. He felt very tired; his legs ached from the prolonged standing upstairs. His mouth was dry. A block away he saw a sign BAR. He made his way there, sat down with relief at the bar, and ordered a whiskey. He felt better after the drink and looked around.

There were only a few customers in the place, mostly couples sitting in booths. At the far end of the bar two young men, arms around shoulders, were harmonizing softly. Danny smiled when he heard them. He ordered another drink and with it in his hand went down to join them. They appreciated his "Rose of Tralee." Danny treated them, had another whiskey for himself, and sang "The Wearin' of the Green." They ordered another round. Danny had noted that the darker of the two didn't know the words and decided he was Italian. He said, "Now for my favorite," and he sang alone "*Bandiera Rossa.*" At the last line the bartender leaned across the counter and slapped his face with a wet towel: "Out! Out! No goddam Red songs here!" And the two young men grabbed him by the elbows and tossed him outside.

Danny got up from the sidewalk and shook his head. "Now, why'd they do that?" he said aloud. "Why? 'S only a song. Confused workers, tha's wha' they are. Confused by the cap'list press."

He staggered down the avenue, mumbling to himself. At 14th Street he went down into the subway. The platform was deserted except for two slim young Puerto Ricans, one in a red sweater, the other in a leather jacket. Danny leaned against a pillar and dozed. He woke with a start as the train rolled in. He started to get on but saw that it was going downtown. "Goin' uptown, I am. To the bus station," he announced to the Puerto Ricans, who were eyeing him.

The train left, and again only the three remained on the platform. The men said, "We'll help you, mister," and holding him up they walked down the platform to the toilet.

Danny laughed when they entered the filthy little room. "Wrong exit. Mus' be the other way." The door was blocked by Red Sweater leaning against it. Leather Jacket said, "Let's have the bread, mister."

Danny's eyes slowly focused on him. "No bread. No bread. Here's for coffee and doughnuts." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change. Leather Jacket took the coins and almost in the same motion grabbed Danny from behind, holding one arm across his neck. With the other he took the wallet from the back pocket while his companion searched in the trousers' side pockets. He spun Danny away from him. Danny slipped and his head struck the stall. He sat dazed for a moment, then shouted, "Up the rebels!" and slowly got up.

Leather Jacket hit him in the face with the back of his hand. "Sh-sh! Shut up or I'll kill ya!"

Danny wiped the blood from the corner of his lips. He coughed and pleaded, "Why'd you do that, fellas? You're colored, I'm white, but all men are brothers. Right?" He began to sing "We Shall Overcome."

Leather Jacket smashed his jaw and Danny fell again. He looked up from the floor, called weakly, "*Avan-*

ti populo! A la rescossa!" Leather Jacket kicked him.

Red Sweater asked. "*Que dice? Habla espanol?*"

Danny scrambled to his feet. "*Si, si! Ay, Manuela! La Quinta Brigada! La lucha final!*"

A train was heard rumbling into the station. Leather Jacket seized Danny, cracked his head against the wall, and threw him into the stall. The two ran from the toilet, leaving Danny lying in the foulness, crying, "Comrades! I'm on your side!"

Footnote to a Lady

• **Bruce Berger**

She had Prussian control
Over that set of rules she took for her soul.
Ever since she had been knee-high
To a commandment, she knew right from wrong
And proceeded thereby.
A relative's blunder, catching her by surprise,
Could summarize glaciers in her eyes.
To one and all she was always polite
And would never criticize till they were kindly out of sight.
Caught once in a childhood fib,
She forever stifled the instinct to ad lib.
In no corner of her house could you find
A rumor of lint, and conversely
She lived in only the most wholesome part of her mind,
At evening she did indulge in a small drink,
Or two, between the stove and the sink.
Neighbors admired her little bump of fun,
Which never of course interfered
With the way things were meant to be done.
Old age overtook her, when at last it dared,
By a process of gradual exclusion
Of those for whom she had cared—
One for the creatures with whom he stooped to mix,
This one for his comedy, that one for her politics,
Till at last she excluded herself as well.
A slightly terrified St. Peter, hearing the knell,
Flung wide the portals of heaven, making it snappy.
And I hope he smiled
For the lady who was always right and never happy.

Trapeze Artist

• Mark S. Cowell

The city was a cold and bleak place in the winter, like a scene done in charcoal. Across from the art museum, ducks froze in the park where the muddy little river had frozen solid. The sun was bright and made long shadows but gave little warmth.

I came striding briskly across the park, my boots in need of new soles, crunching in the frost-brittle grass. I hugged my tattered wool shirt around me. Having abandoned what friends I had, what friends had not abandoned me first, I was making my way toward the museum, where I could spend the afternoon in well-heated rooms.

The guard taking tickets at the door looked down his slight and upturned nose at me when I came in, because of the way I was dressed and the way my nose was running, and probably because it was Saturday and many of the visitors to the galleries were members, dressed as if they were going to the Symphony later in the afternoon. I sneered back at him, weakly.

I wandered with no real sense of purpose, seeing very little, like a person meandering around his own house on a Sunday morning. I'd been here often enough. Most of the rooms contained nothing of interest to me. I stopped every so often to nod a polite good morning to my favorite pieces, and once in awhile I would stop to stare back at people.

I felt no hurry because I had nowhere to go afterwards. I was simply sleepwalking my daydream as I would a dog. The Egyptian child was still mummified in its little painted casket. Upstairs was a wall-sized painting of a beheading beheld by pregnant court ladies. There were many family portraits and I knew them all by name.

I had just left Medieval Christian and expected Renaissance around the corner, when I came to a gallery that stunned me. It had five times as many paintings as was practical, and many of them were on the floor, leaning against each other or the wall. Many were hung with no feeling of symmetry. It looked like a gallery "in the process of being rearranged, thank you," but there were no workmen or barriers. It appeared more like a European gallery where everything was for sale, an informal marketplace. No one else was here. I slipped my hands into my back pockets, where I could feel my buttocks move as I walked, and I strolled around with the feeling that I could purchase anything I chose.

Then a painting halted my feet just as sure as a duck that had gone to sleep on the water the night before and woke to find his webs encased in ice.

In the gilt frame was a circus scene but not a circus like the American extravaganzas under the Big Top. It was a formal circus where the spectators in top hats and opera glasses sat in boxes under decorated trimmings and could almost touch

the performers. The first thing I saw in the painting was a handsome man, dressed in red tights, sitting on a trapeze. He wore a monocle and sat very stiffly as if he had a bad back. He was looking off to his right, my left, and his trapeze was even with a row of boxes three quarters of the way up the picture. On the circus floor beneath him stood a clown with his face painted in a smile despite what his pouting lips betrayed. I could see he was only a child and that deeper behind his face he had never been a child. His young eyes looked up as if they had just met mine this instant, and his gaze was penetrating, disturbing. The rest of the audience was leaning forward in its seats, eagerly watching with strict decorum, except for one; and my eyes, as they had traveled around the painting, had studiously avoided looking in her direction until now, and she had not only noticed me, but stood up in reaction to me, seemed shocked to find me here. She had just risen from her seat and turned toward me with an expression, or how can I explain it, an expressionlessness that painted her face both blank and surprised at the same time, a transition, as if her surprise was giving way to something. waiting to find out what would transpire. I wasn't sure I recognized her but I was sure I should. I glanced down at the clown, who was watching us both, and knew that I should be remembering something and feeling my mind was slipping.

"Who?" I whispered to her, hoping no one would notice.

She was a beautiful lady, no longer young, but not yet old, frozen in that moment, dressed in a pale pink satin gown that buttoned to her neck. I waited for an answer almost as if I expected one, but she could not give it. It was on the tip of her tongue, on the gleam of her eye. If the artist had waited just three seconds longer before capturing her on the canvas, she would tell me. What would she tell me? Who I was? No. She was much too Earthly for vaguenesses of that type.

I turned to my left and started walking along the circular aisle that went around the circus floor, feeling her eyes and those of the clown, following me no matter where I went.

The trapeze artist's eyes were looking ahead of me, toward where an usher stood, and I hurried to catch him before he moved.

I had been placed here by the artist for a purpose, with very little time, and my memory, like essential pages ripped from a book . . .

I came up to the usher. He was a young man but still growing and his suit was too small for him. His face was rounded and freckled, and he wore a funny little flat-topped hat that stayed on his head by means of a little chin strap. He looked like an organ-grinder's monkey. "How do I get backstage?" I asked him.

"I'm sorry, sir," he replied, hardly turning his head, "but only performers are allowed backstage."

"This is important," I said. I had to get around by means of the stage door because I certainly couldn't just step into a solid canvas oil painting with everybody looking. The guards got mad if you just touched them.

Reluctantly he turned to look at me, and the color drained from his face, his whole tone changed. "Oh, Pierre! I'm sorry I didn't recognize you for a moment there. But you— Don't you already—yes, yes, it's quite all right. Over behind the col-

ored ices. Hope you're feeling better, Pierre!"

I was already out of earshot, hurrying and excusing myself as I stumbled along the aisles, stepping on the toes of well-dressed ladies. Across the way I could hear the band playing a slow march tune with too many trumpets and no tuba.

When I saw the door and the long, rounded, canvas-lined hallway that led from behind the booth of colored ices, downward, I broke into a dead run, fearing that it would fade away like a mirage before I reached it. Through and down I ran along the poorly lit tunnel, blank canvas flaps along each side.

Before I reached the end, a figure filled the lighted doorway and came toward me. It was a much older clown in a tattered, dusty suit with giant floppy shoes.

"Say, Pete, you old frog," he said, stopping me just as we were passing. "How do you feel today, chippy chippy?"

"Pretty good," I said, wondering why I didn't recognize him, he looked so familiar. "Why shouldn't I?"

"That was a nasty tumble you took last week. Your noggin wasn't meant to be bounced on, beanhead."

"Yeah," I said. "But I was pretty lucky, I guess."

"You always were, old chap." Far away beyond the canvas darkness where we talked, I heard the band and the cheers of the crowd, rising and falling like giant waves in a storm. "You'd be a king without a prince if it hadn't been for Marie. Forgive my frankness."

"Sure," I mumbled, less intent on his words than on a wave of light that seemed to be rolling into the back of my head from the performance noises outside the backstage sawdust walks. "The little clown."

He slapped me on the back. "Yep, have to be off, Peter; hope to see you up in the ropes real soon. Take care of that head."

I began to run again, having an even clearer sense of danger than before, that something awfully wrong was happening and that I'd have to get back, and around, because I didn't want Marie to be hurt any more than she'd already been.

* * *

Song of Marie:

There once was a time, the dawn of that day, when my mind was free and made his room a castle wide, overlooking the springtime park where birds sang and ducks sailed smoothly across the pond, hardly rippling the water except when they ducked their heads and their little tails popped into view, and lying at my back, he touched me and turned me around. His eyes sparkled in morning sunbeams like cut wide and white and mad as could be, gasping for every breath of sight. He painted furiously in those days and loved with insane jealousy, and in my innocence, I reacted to both with the same natural rhythms that blew the rose back and forth in the green-clear gardens of the park beneath the window. I listened to every word he uttered when he looked at people running by on their way to work with *Wall Street Journals* tucked under their arms, or pushing strollers into the park. or stumbling by in the night breaking empty bottles in the gutter. "I am that man," he'd say and his eyes would roll, "my lungs gurgle and I need a shot." Or the time we found a bird's nest in a tall bush and he shook all over, saying,

"I am not even born yet and the shell is tight around me." He cried in the night beside me, and soon I found one of his little men growing inside of me.

But it wasn't the time for him, the dusk of that day when his mind guessed it. I hadn't told him, fearing his moods. Out he rode from the castle walls, driving me into the black, and the night never let up. He accused me of sabotaging his art, his song, his life, his mind, clipping the wings of the ducks to keep them in the park. He chased me through the city, beating me with his fists until, gratefully, darkness came down. Somewhere near train tracks where lines and lines of silver trains and the smell of animals and sawdust sided, I lay to sleep.

Pierre found me there, coming back from one of his many nighttime walks, haunted strolls he took after the last performance had been given and he'd stripped his gaudy costume. He abhorred but was caught in the world of that train, moving from town to town, from show to show among a people proud. His wife, before she died, had been fertile; Pierre had not. I think I would have loved him, the way his face wrinkled all up and his hand shook when I told him of myself, but I was beyond that. The curtain had come down. I wanted to explode in love for him but every time I started to feel him, I never could quite move, as if I'd been paralyzed in the midst of a change, stopped by black clouds that rolled over me like fists, frozen like a smile in a photograph. So I simply stayed, watched him nightly on his trapeze, and raised our little clown.

* * *

I didn't want to hurt Marie anymore, and I had to be there when it happened, because I was carrying the parts of her mind I had stolen, and she needed them now or she'd never need them again.

I ran past the dressing rooms toward the huge doors, built to accommodate elephants, that led into the center ring, where music jumped up and down like a caliope, merry-go-rounds, and cotton candy mints that dissolve the second you place your tongue on them. I ran panting.

Two policemen ran in from the center ring just as I was about to run out, and grabbed me because of my hurry, before they even noticed who I was. Then they relaxed their grips and said, "Oh, Pierre! Pierre! We are sorry."

"What's this all about?" I asked.

"The madman from Bristol . . ."

"The one the papers have been writing about?" I asked, remembering the panic headlines and the people locking their doors.

"Yes," said the fatter of the two. "He's been spotted here. We're looking for him now. Have you seen anyone in ragged clothes and torn boots?"

The thought of clothing bothered me. I could remember changing into the red costume I now was wearing, even though I wasn't scheduled to perform until the doctor was sure my concussion was better. But I couldn't remember where I had changed. It must have been my dressing room, but I couldn't remember my dressing room. "No, I don't think so," I said.

"How's your head mending, Pierre?" asked the policeman, as his partner continued his chase toward the dressing rooms and the tunnel I had come in.

"Fine, thank you."

"I was on duty, Friday. I saw it. That sure was a nasty fall."

"I'm afraid I'm still having a little trouble with my memory," I told him, anxious to get on my way.

"Certainly, certainly. Good luck, Pierre." The policeman continued as fast as he could with the paunch he was carrying.

Just then a roar came from the crowd outside that was nothing like the usual roar of a circus crowd, but more like the scream of panic. I had heard it once, I remembered, many years before when one of the tents had collapsed. I rushed into the center ring.

High above, George, who had been taking my place as catcher, was sitting on the trapeze, still, looking to his right. My little clown, several feet in front of me was standing, quietly watching above him. Marie was standing in her box, turned toward one of the decorated aisles, transfixed. Police were running in. A man had jumped from the topmost box, down to the sawdust floor.

I couldn't be sure if I had seen him falling or not. It happened in an instant. The crowd was hysterical, and the band had broken hurriedly into another march, the conductor waving his baton for all he was worth. My little clown was now looking down at the body of the man, but my eyes never left Marie. It was as I had feared. She was not moving at all, but staring blankly at the spot from which the madman had started his suicidal plunge.

"George!" I screamed up and my partner turned and saw me. I climbed the ladder effortlessly, reached the near trapeze, and swung over to him. He held me and we swung far out, once, twice, and I let go, arching up and into Marie's box, a stunt I had pulled on our first anniversary, much to the delight of the audience.

The crowd saw nothing, seething back and forth like pacing lions, watching the scene below, noisy and potentially dangerous, but it was only like the swirling background colors of a painting that add to but do not interfere with the foreground subjects. I took Marie by the shoulders and she looked at me.

"Pierre," she said. There were tears in her eyes.

"Tell me," I said, pulling her close.

"That man," she said and her voice was like a wind through winter barren trees. "He was . . . he was . . ."

"He was the father of our little clown," I said.

"But how did you know?" she asked. She didn't expect an answer and there wasn't one. She simply leaned against my chest, sobbing until her body was racked with love for me; I knew that too, and while she cried, I looked over her head, around the hall where people were milling.

The hall had been very luxurious indeed, where we had been giving our show, the walls, like old opera houses, decorated with paintings. One in particular, near where the madman jumped, caught my eye. It was the painting of an art gallery where a man in tattered clothes was staring at a picture, his hands thrust deeply in his back pockets. He looked like he was about to do something but had been frozen an instant before he could. I wondered about him.

Janus

• William J. Thawley

The row houses on my street showed two faces. In the front, two parallel rows of brown-brick houses confronted each other down a gradual incline, like trains frozen in the act of passing on a hill. The opposite sides of the street were nearly identical: the porches paired off into twin brick fortresses with cream-painted posts, trees and electric lamps lining the sidewalks, and at dusk two multicolored metal lines of automobiles converging downward toward Belair Road. Between five and six o'clock the men came home from work with suitcoats hung over their arms, ties undone, or in workshirts, carrying black lunch boxes. During summertime, in the evening, if the dwellers did not watch television, they sat out front—isolated from their neighbors by the brick parapets of the porches.

Seeing these respectable citizens of Baltimore lounging on their porches always gave me the impression that the porches were like the boxes of a theater or stadium, and the people were waiting for a performance to be staged in the street: a performance which, evening after evening, summer after summer, failed to be given. Of course the neighborhood boys played step-ball in the afternoon when there were few cars—bouncing a Pennsylvania Pinky off the lower front steps—and there were occasional games of touch football in the street. But these games were for the benefit of no one but ourselves. And in the early evening we often shifted our games to the alley. Here were the other faces of the houses.

I knew the sights and sounds of the alley best because my bedroom was at the back of the house on the second floor. Several times a week I was awakened early by the barking of the neighborhood dogs and the cries of the black "rag man." They were unintelligible, almost mournful blasts: "Ragsboaaahns! Boaaahns!"

The cries and the clattering of the wagon grew gradually louder approaching from up the alley, and the dogs in the yards nearer to ours took up the barking. I often got out of bed and went to the window to watch the horse pull its rickety burden past our yard. Sometimes the man stopped near our gate to pick up an old rag or a discarded piece of furniture lying at the end of a yard near the garbage cans. The horse stood waiting, his head drooping—immobile except perhaps for a twitching flank. Then the man climbed back onto the seat, shook the reins, and contorted his dark features into another cry. The wagon started up again, the horse clopping its heavy iron shoes down onto the cement, and disappeared from my sight behind garages down the alleys, rattling, the bells on the horse's harness jingling. As the cries grew fainter, the barking of the dogs in the yards diminishing, I knew the wagon had reached the bottom of the alley and was gone.

In warm weather the alley was often a marketplace. White and black

hucksters traveled down the alley in decrepit trucks or red horsedrawn wagons with yellow lettering, selling fresh fruit, vegetables, and crabs. The women gossiped over the fences and haggled with the hucksters. I staged battles with toy soldiers in the yard, listening to my mother talk to neighbors as she hung the wash up on the line.

It was during one of these military re-enactments when I first saw the blind beggar. The Germans were entrenched at the bottom of the yard where the grass stopped, the soil in which large bushes grew beginning in a depression. I was at the top of the grass plot checking the American positions for the assault. Dogs began barking down the alley. I heard singing, mixed with the jangling notes of a steel-stringed guitar and the ring of a tambourine. I went to the gate and looked down the alley to see who was the cause of this music.

A black man, singing and playing the guitar, was walking up the middle of the alley. Off to one side a little boy danced with a tambourine. As they approached, I saw that the man wore dark glasses. His body swayed in time with the music—a white cane dangling from the crook of his left arm like a pendulum. His song communicated a sadness to me as his voice rose from low bellowing notes to high ones, where it trembled.

A woman who lived three yards down came out of her house and walked to the gate. Holding up his tambourine, the boy ran over. A few coins fell from the woman's hand drumming lightly into the tambourine. The boy thanked her and ran over to the blind man to deposit the coins in a tin cup which hung from the neck of the guitar. When they passed our yard, the blind beggar stopped singing and began to blow and suck air through a harmonica supported at mouth level by a wire frame hanging around his neck. I thought the boy was the son of the blind man and felt bad because he couldn't play in the summer but had to follow his father around to help him get money.

Farther up the alley another woman and a girl plopped coins into the tambourine. When I saw the girl give them money, I thought that I should have, too, but my mother had taken her purse with her when she left to go shopping. I watched the two figures turn the corner at the top of the alley: the blind man had stopped playing and was tapping the cane before him to feel the curb of the pavement.

That evening I ate my food in silence, thinking what would happen to us if my father became blind or what would happen to me if I became blind. I tried to see if I could eat my food with my eyes closed—until I dribbled milk down my chin.

"What are you doing?" my mother asked.

"Nothing," I said. Bending to my plate more conscientiously, I wiped the milk away from my mouth.

"Blind people must have other people who pick out their clothes for them and cook for them and read things for them, huh, Dad?" My father had finished eating and was leaning back in his chair in the process of lighting a cigarette.

"I suppose they do," he said. "You've seen blind people with seeing-eye dogs too, haven't you?"

"On television," I said.

"Why do you want to know about blind people?" my mother said.

"For no reason. I just wondered."

I left the table, went down to the

cellar, and practiced walking around with my eyes closed. After a few minutes I stopped because I could not keep myself from cheating, partly opening my eye to see if I was going to bump into something.

The next day I waited for the blind man, but he did not come. After two more days of fruitless waiting, I ceased to think about him. Over a week later I was walking down the alley on my way home from the neighborhood grocery store. Carrying a six-pack of Coca Cola and a small bag of groceries, I walked slowly following the progress of a large red ant that rested on a piece of paper floating in the gutter down the middle of the alley. The barking of dogs from the bottom of the alley became audible, and I heard again the voice and clanging guitar of the blind man.

I hurried home and, r u s h i n g through the kitchen, deposited the cokes and bag of groceries on the table. My mother was in the living room reading the paper when I rushed in and asked if I could give some nickels from the change to the blind man. My mother asked what blind man was I talking about. I said the blind colored man who came up the alley singing and playing the guitar. When she said I could, I went out into the yard and sat on the back steps by the kitchen door waiting. The sun was at its highest point and, sticky with perspiration, I wiped drops of sweat from my upper lip with my hand. The blind beggar and the boy appeared from behind the garage four yards down the alley. Mrs. Hoffman, who lived one house down, shouted to them from her door. Would they like something cool to drink? The boy looked at the blind man. Ceasing to play, the blind man spoke in a low voice to the boy, who turned and said:

"Yes, ma'am. We'd appreciate it."

Mrs. Hoffman disappeared into her house. When I next saw her thin form emerge, she carried two glasses and a pitcherful of what looked like lemonade. She walked to the gate, handed the glasses to the boy, and, bending over the gate, filled them both. The blind man stood facing the houses on our side, his head slightly elevated. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead and mouth. When the boy handed him the glass, he thanked the general air before him including both the boy and Mrs. Hoffman. Although he stood erect, his frame seemed to be weighed down by his flesh; his clothes hung on his body damply.

"It's really a hot one today—isn't it?" Mrs. Hoffman said.

"Yes, it is," said the blind man, grinning at the house.

Mrs. Hoffman looked over into our yard. She waved and said hello. The boy watched over the rim of his glass as I waved back. I gazed down at the cement—holding the nickels in my wet palm. Mrs. Hoffman asked if they wanted any more. The blind man handed his empty glass back to the boy.

"No, thanks," he said.

The boy said he would have some more and drank another glass quickly. Mrs. Hoffman took the empty glass from him and, laying both glasses and the pitcher down on the lid of a garbage can, reached into her apron pocket for some coins.

I rose from the steps and walked down to the gate as the blind man began to play again. The boy walked up to the gate and held up his tambourine. Our eyes met briefly. With

embarrassment on both sides, he looked away up the alley as I added three nickels to the coins Mrs. Hoffman had dropped into the tambourine. The boy muttered his thanks and deposited the coins in the blind man's cup.

As the blind man passed in front of me, I saw the dull white of one eye behind the dark glasses. He wore a white linen suit and a white shirt with a thin black tie. I was a little in awe of him because I had seen a play on television about heaven: the cast had been all Negroes—all the angels and God. The blind beggar reminded me of the man who played Gabriel, but the blind man had a guitar instead of a horn. He appeared to be over fifty in age, and I thought he must get tired walking and singing all day with the heavy guitar slung around his neck. Beads of sweat were apparent at his temple and along the line of his jaw.

As I watched the white clad figure proceed down the alley, I decided to follow. I waited until Mrs. Hoffman had gone back into her house and the pair had turned the corner before I left the yard.

Walking quickly up the alley, I held my breath as I passed the yard where the woman rarely cleaned up her dog's mess. When I approached the end of the alley, I slowed my pace; stopping, I peered around the corner. The blind man and his assistant were passing by the grocery store on the corner of the next street down. The blind man was not playing—only walking slowly, tapping his white cane before him. When the pair turned into the alley which ran behind the store, I stepped onto the curb and walked briskly, hands in pockets to appear nonchalant, along the pavement skirting the corner house.

I waited at the entrance to the alley until they were halfway to the bottom. I followed slowly—keeping close enough to hear the blind man's voice and guitar. The two figures turned right at the bottom of the alley; no one had come to the gate to give them anything. I hurried down the alley afraid that I might lose sight of them. When I reached the alley at the bottom which crossed the other at right angles, the blind musician and the boy were disappearing left on Lake Avenue toward Bel-air Road.

I saw them standing outside the bar on the corner near the traffic light—apparently waiting for the street car which would take them back to the Negro section of town. Instead of following them directly, I crossed to the other side of Lake Avenue and then turned and walked slowly down the street. Leaning against the side wall of the bakery on the corner opposite the bar, I considered turning back. I glanced once more at the blind man just in time to see him suddenly start forward. Then staggering backward he collapsed onto the pavement. The guitar banged against the cement ringing out atonally. A few other people who had been waiting for the street car gathered around the motionless form on the pavement. A man who had been watching from the doorway of the bar came out and, crouching down, unhooked the strap of the guitar and lifted the instrument off the blind man's chest. The boy took the guitar and stood clutching it by the neck. He moved backward with small steps—staring at the blind man with frightened eyes. Moving closer, yet not crossing the street, I saw that

blood stained the pavement near the blind man's head.

A woman among the onlookers said to call an ambulance.

"The poor man!"

"Heat stroke," one old woman nodded to another.

The man from the bar was speaking to the blind man whose lips remained motionless. A policeman crossed Belair Road and approached the crowd gathered around the blind man. He told the people to step back and he bent down to the blind man, who looked incongruous lying there in his white suit with all the white people standing around. When the policeman stood up, he turned to the boy and asked him what was the blind man's name.

"Janus," the boy answered.

"Is that all? Doesn't he have a last name?" the policeman asked.

"No."

"Is he your father?"

"No," the boy said.

The policeman again asked the people to stand back, and he crouched by the blind beggar. He said something in a low voice to the man who had come from the bar. I looked at the boy, who still stood miserably guarding the blind man's guitar. In his eyes the moist fright had flamed to anger, which he directed at the pavement by his feet.

Peninsula

• **Gilbert Carroll**

Her body nearly eluding her grasp,
With language quivering her carelessly embroidered face
She throttles my impatience
Trying to convince me of her thought, however dilute:

She peremptorily pushes out all her stagestruck hands
With selfconscious elbows; but only conveys
The same hazy attempts
That frozen bat's wings express
Long after their numbed nerves care to question.

And then satisfied that she'd quite forgotten
Whatever it was she wanted to tell me
She withdraws in her fitfully soughing stockings
Up to her room of quiet furniture.

There, in warm, lace-tippled sunlight
She rocks away the damasked hours
Reassured by that gentle motion of
Something she'd quite forgotten.

Three Poems

• T. Alan Broughton

Fall

The mountains were an edge of frost
honed to cut the distant blue
and trees were bleeding near at hand
as though they clutched the season's edge.
Across the corners of the panes
the cluster flies made torpid groups
of black and seething stains. The horse
was cropping final green, the willow
lapsed its yellow fingers down
to bleaching grass, and when I turned
my hand palm up, I saw the lines
divide, pale as the cracks in ice.

May 6, 1969

(FOR MARY)

Light was light all day.
No false illumination
of the sky, it shifted
Over the bowl of lake
and hills, brought changes
to the unmoved trees.
Beneath us, rock,
above, the hawks in glide.
We spoke and touched
and reached for constancy.

Light on the limbs,
birds in the net of trees;
we let our bodies
rest and cup the wind.
Even the hawks
at varying heights
held wings as silent
as the touch of brail,
and wrote the ease
of undivided air.
We touched, contained
our circling constancy.

I do not fear
the images of loss.

While driving home
I saw hung from a tree
that struck the darkening grass
a tire that swung
from rope and twisted
slow. There was no sound,
the circle gaped
and arced out to us
empty in its flight.

Hawks in the sky,
light that is light,
flesh that we touch
and trees on their way
to leaves: I speak
of fullness flowing
beyond all brims.
We spoke and touched
and reached our constancy.

Therapy

In your office
five minutes late
I detail how hard
it is to park.
Distant but friendly
you agree,
then cough
once,
your rap to open
corridors,
then lapse
to professional silence.
Maps are on your wall.
Buenos Aires,
Orinoco,
Sea of
"Doctor, this week
I am cut off.
Forgive us our sins
of glib, unprophesying tongues.
Give us our daily reticence."
But for fifty minutes more
I will gibber and squeak,
wheeling pale
around the bloody flesh
my mind throws up
to this pit of mouth.
Ulysses hears
and is ashamed.

Melancholia

• Wayne M. Towers

Alone, I stand on scrubby shore, ruffled by wind,
Cried by gulls, watching endless whitecaps meet, and mate,
Tumbling in conjugation, impelled by the moon,
Sundered by the breakwater, exhausted on the shore.
The ephemeral caress of these salt-blooded lovers
Ignores the washing pain that laves the web of thought.

I am strung out like a net, dripped and drying.
Beaded with salt seas, frayed with effort. Frayed with use,
I am mended, only to be frayed again.
Mended by the fisherman, the man of strong, sure craft,
The man who draws his life from the sea, and my bursting.
Does this man, this lonely, self-sufficient man,

Contemplate my mending? Does he feel the sure slip
Of thread, conspiracy of survival, and,
Meditating on the world he limns within the sea,
Does he look to the stars that tumble and copulate
Like fishes? Shoals of light, little life-flickers,
Swimming in a world distant from men's thoughts.

A pulse of life that graying men with metal ears
Net with traceries, and draw a harvest to be reaped
Into electric stores, that red receded draws away
The dreams of men to distances that dwarf
My limitless ocean's gulf.

Alone I am, stretched between two poles,
Listening to the skies with dim, corded ears.
Electronic subtleties elude me, but I hear,
Amid the ocean murmuring love, and ecstasies
Of tumbling gulls, the faint voice of a love
I cannot reach; and, dreaming of her return,
Dragging wine-dark robes, like Wordsworth's child,

Withdraw to an unknown space to turn like a cold,
Pocked world, and pulse like a quasar, loud, strong, clear,
Heard, but never understood, like the beacon on the point.

Memorial

• Matt Field

Cardboard feathers,
scarlet in the elmshade on the Common;
the school band scatters starlings
from the white steeple
and children in costumes dodge
among parked cars.

Tercentenary sunlight
lies along dusted shelves, refracted in
scrubbed glass cases of artifacts
in the exhibition,
vibrating in amplified speeches
and recitation.

A stir in the quiet
wakens dust in the floorboards, dry rot
in the paneling, unforgotten parchment
odor of the past,
but breaks and falls away from
the sealed glass.

June air, compound
of buttered popcorn, exhaust fumes,
and the brown river bending
below the milldam,
floods the opened museum windows
but ebbs and falls away.

Safe in their cases,
precisely labeled, woven baskets
of patterned brown grass hold
powdery kernels
of yellow corn; the hollow
grinding stone is empty.

Even preserved
from air the beadwork crumbles and
the purple shells have faded;
on the tablet
in the Square there is no record
of Their going.

A Clarification

• Robert West

To confess
As the bonebare aged do
With bells in place of teeth

And sing
In disregard of each chance note
As dice bouncing on frosted tile.

One fine day breaks
In a chorus of cattails
And a rowdy riveting of light:

One doesn't ask for proof—
Those eyes, brought to a boil
By the midday sun, are enough.

Explorers

• Albert Goldbarth

"We have discovered in rat psychology
(and apparently it works in children too) . . ."
    You slam that textbook page, its lips are crushed.
With the raft's one steer-pole we spear that tome, our burnt
Offering in the campfire. It is charred, and silent.
We toss it in the fringed lagoon; it twists and turns
Furry with the sunken coins.

This is our
Life, now.

Sheer clouds, and cider. Beneath the blue batiste of sky,
Our heads at noon upon the ground's thin crust
Quiver: in time to the tempo of the heavy throb of the world's great
Glistening body-sacs below.
We are almost there.

At dusk you leave. You have hiked ahead
Without me. This is correct.
Before I light my candle
In the planet's midnight chest, I must check
My own heart. It can't be ore,
Or paper.

Eternite

• Alfred A. Ruggiero

Gray sea and gray sky
At evening
Sand pale clean
And the cool faint of
Mist after dusk
And far up the beach
A figure
Dark gray against
Misty gray
At evening
Coming alone
To no one but
You
In the utter silence
Of always now

Medea Mourns Briefly for Orpheus

• Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.

Orpheus had sung
the marriage hymn
at their wedding.

Jason listened
though his eyes
never left

the golden fleece.
Under ceremonious boughs
of the island,

Medea herself
had lidded
her eyes

to watch a
settlement of worms
at her sandal toe.

Nevertheless, she
wished now
that the Ciconean

women had not
torn Orpheus to
bleeding shreds

for his scorn of them.
If Orpheus were
alive, he might sing

now, before the nurse
brought Jason's children
to their mother.

If his hand
flamed the lyre
string, he might melt

that smooth round
stone that banged
in her breast

where Apollo's priest
said a human heart
was supposed to be.

Something Just Over the Edge of Everything

• H. E. Francis

"Wind, you never felt *this* way before," old Gert Cobb said and flicked her eyes shut tight to let the wind touch all over her. "Spring warm as baby skin." She laughed aloud, passing Starrett's grocery, and stopped to listen: the sea sounded in a slow *wooooosh, wooooosh* from beyond the potato fields. It lifted her right out of herself. The grocery clerk was out soaking up sun. "Hear that?" she said.

He frowned. "It's just the Sound."

"Boy, that's the whole ocean. Why, it sounds like forever." And just at that moment the bells from St. John's pealed out the midday hymn. "Good Lord! It's high noon. Stell's waiting." And she quickened, hobbling along on her arthritic legs.

This morning she *swore*—promised herself no matter how Bill acted—she woudn't go to Stell's. It's Bill's last day home, he's my *husband*. But she'd gone every Monday for—well, she coudn't remember when she *didn't* go—and Stell *was* her longest friend, almost family. Then Bill said, hard, "How come you staying home?" "I'll *go* then," she said, waiting. "Yeah," Bill grumped. "Stell's son Dean's home, there's something special," she said. "Yeah," Bill said. "Well, if you want, I'll stay." "No, you go," he said.

All those years in that house together, and he had long since drifted from her, gone into that quiet he lived in. God knows she tended—cleaned, washed, cooked. "I wobble on these pins, Stell," she'd say. Her great hands would come down on knees like stone monuments. "I drag around that hospital four hours." She was good at it, clean as a whistle her wards were.

And there was Stell, pretty as a picture.

"Just in the nick," Stell said.

"I'd be on time for my own funeral," Gert whooped, for they were off, the afternoon was launched. It made her feel all young to be with Stell. On the bleak days when the storm gray came close, pressing its dark face against the land so you couldn't move without its breath at you from every side, Stell held it off. Stell understood, she *lived* every minute with her hand in needle point, finishing chairs, rug making, and clubs and charities and her fabled baking.

"You sure got the magic, Stell." Her hand yearned to touch. The table tempted, a real kaleidoscope of color fallen into a beautiful pattern. "All my years taught me nothing like that. Your man's lucky. My Bill—he never came home to no spread like this."

"He came home to you. It's what a man finally does come to."

"Never once," Gert said. Walls seemed to split open. She'd said she

wouldn't let them. He's going today —you knew that—and I should be with him now, but I couldn't. He doesn't *want* me, you know that, Stell. You can feel when somebody wants you or don't. Right away when I got up this morning and even before I looked at him with his eyes wide open staring up at the ceiling, I said, He don't want you, Gert. Like you come into a room and all day there's a smell's not for your nose. Oh, I don't know how to say it."

"You've said it strong enough for me."

"Now that's no way to talk when I'm eating, is it? Still it strikes me that way. And something else—I'll tell you: he *wants* to go."

"Oh, no—he can't."

"Oh, yes, he *does*. Wants to get out. Doesn't care. He's give up, Stell, long since. Like he sat down one day and said, It's over, I'm not doing nothing more, not even moving. And you know he hasn't, hasn't—"

"Now, Gert—Your Ron's coming. And Bill'll be just a couple of hours away. You can see him when you want, and with your son working next door to the home, you'll have news in every letter from him."

"Sure," she said, staring into bits and gobs of caked seafood. "Truth is I *want* him to go too—you 'stand that?—like a great thing's lifted off us. And he'll get right things, there'll be more people and doctor help—for when he gets those funny spells like he don't know me. See?"

"Some Sunday we'll drive up."

"Holidays they let them come home if they're okay."

"We—Listen. There's Dean." The car door slammed, and before Gert could think, there he was, pushing in, arms filled with bundles. "You!" he cried, setting them down, "You!" pointing his finger at her—to shoot.

"Ha!" she cackled, "Hahahaha," throwing her head back. *Years* he had done that, since childhood, their bond from the time-when.

"Dean!" She clapped her hands joyfully. He kissed her on the cheek, took one of her hands. "You beautiful antique!" "You," she said, proud. That voice! How it touched her, softer than hands. Refined. And he smelled clean man-smell, after-shave and soap smell. "I don't hear nothing for looking," she said, all stares. "What you been up to? Now you tell me everything," she said, clapping her hands.

The sun came down, the cherries on the tablecloth glowed. She'd seen him first in Stell's arms, all little body and red. "Dean sounds real royal," she'd said, and *Dean* Stell and Linas named him—for her, it was her mark on him. And right out of that little flesh came the kids in the schoolyard, the fights with Ron, the girls, the near drowning, diploma, summers away and work and college—all in that flesh sitting there. All my years, all the years of Bill, and all Ron's life—Her eyes soared to the kitchen clock. She shivered as if in a sudden breeze—like sometimes she could hear it upstairs in her empty house: it came down the stairs and ran all through. With instinct she raised her hands. They caught at her eyes in the mirror. Big. Claws with no perch. She wanted to hide them. But there was no place.

"Gert! You're not even listening. I'm—going—to—be—married."

"Married!" Suddenly her eyes couldn't see him. He floated up over the sideboard into the mirror, blending with her own half-image she could see. He was saying, "Scarsdale . . . and Jewish, but we'll work that

out . . . and sweet, with talent in advertising . . . and no June bride, but September—" This time she kissed *him*. "Married." The tide rose over the house, f l o o d e d the room, *wooooosh, wooooosh*. What did it mean, married? There was Bill. And Ron. His son. Yes, from the first, Bill had made Ron *his* son. Now Bill was going away, and Ron was taking him. After all the arguments. the tension of years, Bill's slow drifting . . . And what am I, just something they tore life out of, a passageway?

"Bill?" He was standing in the mirror.

"Oh, *Gert,*" Stell said. "I *forgot*—"

"What?" Gert said. Bill was gone. It was Stell now, and Dean. "I forgot where I was."

Stell laughed.

"I did." She laughed it off too. But she had. She looked into the mirror. Something's wrong, she said. I wasn't here. "Got to go." Now she hurried. She was floating—toward the door.

"I'll go with you," Dean said. "You'll need help packing."

"Take her in the car," Stell said, clutching her hand, the only sign—

"That short way?" Gert said.

"A few blocks can be eternity sometimes—if your son's waiting."

But outside she said, "Let's walk—it's my last request, before you get married" she pealed out. "It's excitement, beginning."

"She'll be here—almost tomorrow," he said.

"Be sure you make her see what's here, on this island. It's in *you* too, I know." The sky came down, and the sea came in. "Married—it's an anchor in all that. Keeps you in the center, like—you seen it—the eye of the hurricane. Like that."

"For chief cook and bottle washer you're pretty philosophic today." But his voice changed, came like a quick arm around her.

"Don't laugh. *Don't* now," she said. You're thinking I don't mean it, but he'll be happy there, yes. It's his way now—been, for a long time: he's just not *with* you. And he wants to be out of it. We'll be free—see?—the first time. Only I dont know what that is . . ." The wind always battering at the walls, the endless sky? You can let it in, there'll be space now.

"And the house?"

"He—Ronnie—don't want it. Never did. It's not modern. And he can't keep two places. He's making me sign it over to the state—it'll pay our keep. No more work now. I'll be to home. And Bill'll get what he needs then at the . . . home. Ron won't all time be making trips to see how he is."

"And you?"

"Me? Lord, Dean, with two legs and a whole house!" But her eyes were riveted ahead now: the '63 Chevy was in the drive, a black shine by the house. "It's Ron," she said, then "Och!" She cramped. "An old lady can't hurry that way."

"Got a safety pin inside you."

"You would!" she said. "Ron. Oh, Ron." He was just coming out of the house and stopped in the doorway, short and stocky. It jolted her, her wind belched inside. "Spit and image." Forty years the father went in and out, then he was the son. But the voice was weaker, nasal, not strong and deep like Bill's. "Just got here."

"I was at Stell's."

"Pop said." There was no attack in it, he knew her routine.

Inside, Bill was sitting in his leather chair by the window; and with

the four of them, it felt all crowded, close to, and low.

"Hello, Dean. I saw you coming. I's watching. Come to see the old man carted off?"

"Bill!"

"Oh, he don't mean nothing, Ma."

But Dean laughed it off. "If I had your luck with a little free time . . . ! But look here—don't you go complaining about modern gadgets, Bill, because I brought one with me. You'll need that—with all those women to flirt with."

"A Remington—good stuff, Dad," Ron said. Bill grappled, the cord fell and hung, he wound it in.

"Present?" he said. She saw his hand tremble.

She felt her legs go stiff, her jaw hard, and she said, "I'll go up and get the few things in the bedroom."

"Let me carry them," Dean said, and Ron rose too.

"You keep your father company," she said to Ron.

The bedroom was the bright bowl —all light, huge windows that let the whole sea in. Below, the land went vast into the horizon; above, all forever going on and on in her sight; and that sound of sea! "Paralyzes you!" she said. From downstairs came the two voices, distant and muted like the sound of rocks chafing gently in the undersea current. "My Ron was born in this here room. Now why'd I say that? Where else'd he be born?"

"He woke up to the world's best view," he said.

"Yeah. That Sound makes you feel—" Her hand went out, seemed to grapple.

"I know what you mean."

"You do?"

"As if it comes up over you and there's no more time, only now, and all peace everywhere."

"Yes. *Yes*," she cried, setting her hands against the screen, as if trying to reach into it. But the sun on her hands, big and worn, hard and callused and raw-looking in that hard light, made her pull them down. Then she fell to, darting back to the packages. "Take these down. I'm coming."

She began a quick last check, pulled open the closet door—She stared into the dark hole, the empty left side where his clothes had been. Space. "What am I doing?" She shut it, making a quick turn to the window. Now the blue was everywhere, blue pouring in, blue inside—she felt she was on the bottom of the sea, the water was rising over, all was quiet except for those sounds in the dark stairway down.

"Ma!" Ron. All impatience, that voice.

"I'm on my way." She took the two suits—one he never wore, dark with pin stripes, the Sunday best for special occasions that almost never came, all moth-smelly too. "You got to air this out when you're there. I should've done it, but I didn't realize—"

"Didn't realize," Bill muttered.

"Please, Bill. not at the last minute," she muttered, all her heart suddenly swollen and full in her. I can't breathe, she thought. "You better open that door," she said.

"Why—you in a hurry?" Bill said.

"You *know* better than that," she said.

Even Ron said, "*Pa.*" But she tried to say: spring . . . flowers . . . sea . . . what? Anything to let out her heart growing, to give it space. But no words came. She stood still. I can't fall, she thought. Through the sun

glare and heat waves shimmering over the fields beyond, small clouds floated like suds. She waited—in a minute something would come, sweep her up, she could float, drift—The lilacs dipped in through the screen, the hedge wriggled over the lawn. . . .

Bill said, "You pack the car?" to Ron.

"No, sir," Dean said. "*My* special services required." But Ron scooped up a box—

"I made it small as I could. You can get it all in with no crowding. I'm keeping some things here you won't need just yet. They don't give you lots of room there." But the house would be all of sudden big, it would spread wide and high. . . .

When the car was all packed and she turned back in, her breath caught: Bill was standing in the doorway like that again. Now why'd he have to do *that* again?

Ron said, "We better get started if we're going the same day."

"Yes," she said, and the ground rose an instant, then settled. Bill came down the steps. She saw his shoes—one hole unlaced, how he liked them. Even after he'd passed, she saw the holes on the walk.

"You'll be seeing enough people from around here, you'll get sick of us," Dean said, but she was watching Bill's eyes roam far down left, where the other houses were, patches white as lace through the trees, and the steeple, and town, then clear space. His eyes came back, bluer than sky. He's taking it with him, she thought and reached out, even if he made no move toward her, and brushed her lips over his dry skin. But his own eyes were like blinds pulled down. "Now you drive careful, Ron," she said, but that motor already gunned, drowning her out, he waved fast and left them standing in a fine shadow of dust balled up around them.

It was all over—just that quick. Forty years sudden-over. And where'd we get to? First Bill's here, then almost as quick Ron's here. Where they *going?* Abruptly she wanted to call, Wait for me! She started up the walk. She *had* to see. "I'm going upstairs, I can see them from the window. You don't mind—one minute—do you?" Already she was on the stairs—how hollow they sounded—to her . . . their room. She could see up-island two or three miles—more. The little black car was just turning past the caution light at the crossroads, along the potato fields, toward Southold, moving fast, too fast. As she watched, she felt herself grow, grow and grow, but never be able to fill the emptiness. No—Her hands touched at the screen—she wanted to pull them back. Come back, let me help you. For all her life she'd thought. Let him be more, in his heart. But she said, "I made him—small. It was what we made." And she stared down the thin road that seemed slithering in the distance, and the sun over the western trees burnt into her eyes until the trees and fields rose in green-brown waves, and tiny clouds dirty as dishrags floated over.

Dean's footsteps below harkened her back. She swung around—too fast, and the window, the whole room, swung around in a thick current, and her feet moved with difficulty. She *wanted* to float along easily, but her leg fought up, the other fought up, and her hands stroked out in awful slow motion, yearning, yearning forward—She struck the bedroom door, rocked out into the hall, and started down—it was so dark!—and the stairs shone—so much wax!—and

one blended into the other smooth as a slide, and she felt herself sucked down faster and faster, plunging, with her arms out, lunging headlong down toward the hole at the bottom, where the sunlight struck hard and bold on the floor. And far off someone deep in the hole called her, called her again, "Gert . . . Gert!" And she opened her mouth wide to answer, but no sound came.

When she opened her eyes, there was a vast space, all shifting dark and light—and slowly she came up, striving, like when a girl swimming underwater in the Sound, and suddenly there was air and light and space—and it all cleared. Directly before her was a window—and sky, but far. My window! she nearly said, but it was not—was not wood, not divided into pretty little squares, not cozy, and no curtain. Gone. Something dark . . . a head . . . a face, came close. "Hello." It was a man she didn't know—but—yes . . . *yes*: Doctor Barron. "How are you, Mrs. Cobb?" I'm fine. Where's my window? Where—"How are you, Mrs. Cobb?" he said again. I'm fine. Fine! Why didn't he hear? I'm fine. But no sound came. *She* heard none. She *felt* none. And when he raised his head out of view, she turned her own head to follow, but it didn't move. She raised her arm to tilt, turn over —but it didn't move. Nothing moved, nothing. I'm in the hospital, hospital. But I *work* here. Get out of bed. Bill! she cried. Ron! No sound came, no one heard, but *she* heard motion, shifts and scrapes, rubber soles, brushings, far-off buzzings and bells. . . . Now she remembered: she went downstairs, Dean was waiting. She must hurry back, or he'd be gone. No, that wasn't right. Something happened: I went downstairs, I—fell. She felt no pain, nothing, yet she couldn't move. She saw clouds drifting over, beyond the window; she heard sounds everyhere, but she felt nothing—*nothing*. The word filled her with terror. What'll they think's wrong? I'm fine, *fine*, she cried desperately, tearing with all her might with her arms, wrenching her eyes out of their sockets—but nothing happened, she was lying there, still. I'm paralyzed. I won't *try* to move. I'll save my energy, maybe . . . And she did, she lay still a long time, letting the little rags in the sky float over her eyeballs and the sun inch its way into shadows, but she heard buzzers, chimes, hushed voices, and steps going up and down, to and fro —where, going *where?* Why not here? And then—times—her eyes swam in darkness. She wanted to shout: Where is it? Where's light? sun? But she saw only corners and edges, window edges and gleams against the metal and pinpoints of light deep in the night distance. It was then she thought of her house: I must get up and go, the house is empty, all my rooms are waiting, without me it's not ours, I have to hold it together, something might come. . . .

Bill would be sitting in his room at Brentwood now, and Ron in his rented room, where he went every night after work in the hospital. She had to keep the walls whole so that if they came—They'd expect that, even if they never said. Inside, she knew. Besides, there was something, something might come. I been waiting. But no—it would be like everything else: in the garden you put out hydrangea slips, and they died; slugs ate at the petunias; wind tore off shingles; water rotted away the posts; and snow and ice pressed at

the fence, wedged into the walk, splitting the cement. Trying to get at us and destroy. You got to fight it all the time. If I stay here too long, my house—

Then—times—right in the middle of her words, she'd take a long journey, she'd go out through the window, and the star would come toward her. She felt herself rise out of her whole body. Yes, *yes*, she'd say as the star blazoned toward her, and then when it stopped, she reached out and her hands followed after it, went deep into the whole night flowing toward her.

As abruptly, it would go. I'll never get out. Never. My house—Bill—Ron—And she heard them. She laughed to hear them. Their voices fell like water, soothing and cool over her in this burning heat, and she closed her eyes to let it sink deep into her veriest bone.

"You all right, Gert?" It was Bill. He come running—she wanted to think that.

"Mama, you'll be home in no time." Ron! Home . . .

She opened her eyes. They *were*—standing there at the foot of the bed. Ron. Bill. She must be tilted, the room was at such an odd angle. She reached out her arms—

But no arms moved. Both of them stared at her, waiting.

"She can't hear nothing," Bill said.

I *do*. Everything, she cried.

"Looks it though, her eyes all at us like that."

"She's like that all the time," the nurse said.

Tell them I can hear! she shouted.

"Gert?"

Dean—

"Dean brought us. He went all the way up. Ron's car broke down after I got to Brentwood."

Dean sat on the bed and bent low over her, trying to make her hear, whispering in her ear, close. "Gert, it's me, Dean. And Bill and Ron. And mother—"Stell. Stell . . . ? And there she was, all white and pretty, with a big picture hat over her chestnut hair, to keep clear of sun. Where all you been? It's so long—I was upstairs in my bedroom, I heard Dean downstairs, and I—But their faces were still, mute, blunted. They didn't hear, they didn't *hear*. She struck out, she cried out, *Lis*ten, *listen* to *me!* What's wrong with you all? But nothing registered. They made a semicircle around her bed. They didn't stay long. And now and again they were back, bending over, cutting off the sky, sometimes their eyes close to her, sometimes just black shadows cutting out the sun. It was worse then, because then she couldn't see the sky or be touched by it, and she knew she couldn't touch them or be touched by them, that flesh she wanted to touch and couldn't.

Other times she heard voices: Doctor Barron's, the nurse's, a patient's. They didn't know how her hearing seemed to have grown so keen—she heard everything, oh yes. "How long'll she be like that?" Bill. "Let's step outside," the doctor said, but the voices came: "She won't get better. No telling how long she'll go on. On the other hand, there *are* cases—"

And sometimes she took that journey. She had such a feeling that if she went far enough over, if she ever got the least near the wake of that star, it would suck her into the thick of the current, down over the edge of everything, and she would see—

"Gert?"

Dean—and Stell. She knew their time; always now when they arrived it was afternoon, two-ish by the sun.

But she couldn't tell in all the gray now. And this afternoon Dean bent down to whisper—how he never gave up, that boy!—"Gert, it's Stella and Dean."

"Please, Dean. She can't," Stella said.

Oh, I can. I can. Dean—

"I know she can, Mother." He spoke in her ear again. He had started giving her the day's news a week ago—eyes, seven accounts now—even if she couldn't reply. But today there was something new in his voice, some new quivering. He was smiling down into her eyes. "This is Myra, Myra. She wanted to come today." And there was the girl—his wife she'd be soon. How lovely with all that light on her and her hair glowing. He was back down beside her, he whispered in her ear, "And someday we'll have a girl, it'll have your middle name, Marcia. Marcie." And just at that moment she was aware that she had been listening—*not* to his words, but to his sound, his breath, the sound of him, of air. Breath. She closed her eyes to hold in the feel of the sound of his breath inside her. She was filled with the discovery of the feel of the sound of life moving in his breath. She was giddy with it.

"You see, she's gone to sleep," Stella said.

No. Her eyes flung open, light poured in with sudden violence, tears sprang up.

"Oh, the light must be burning her eyes," Stella said. "Nurse—"

No, *no.*

"She understands, I know she does," Dean said.

Yes, Dean. Yes. Tell me.

But what she felt, what she wanted to feel, was the sensation of the sound of his breath in her.

"There must be some way to make her know she's us," he said to Myra. "Those years of her in our house made her—I'm as much her as Mother's."

Ron, she called out to Dean. Her heart thudded—she was *sure* she felt it—her heart beat in her, and it made the whole white wall and the sky beat. *Ron.* She felt her heart thrust her up for a minute. The nurse came.

"I think the light's hurting her eyes, they're watering," Stella said, "poor dear."

"Don't please," Dean said to the nurse. "I know her. I know she loves the light. It can't hurt her, really, can it?"

"All right," the nurse said gently.

When they all went, she concentrated as hard as she could, trying to remember the sound of the feel of his breath in her ear. And slowly, little by little it came—*yes.* And she tried—hard—to make her own breath come so she could hear it, to make it come fast, faster, faster, and hard, hard—*hard.* And she *could* hear it. Me. The sound filled her, his sound, all the others' sounds, and the sea's out there below, on the beach. She wanted to sit up and see but, knowing she couldn't, she settled into memory and saw her beach and her sea—it came into her like the light from the window. And she saw the two boys down there—Stell and I sent them out into the world. Marcie. She'll be like my granddaughter, she said, feeling herself rise. Bill. She wanted to tell Bill *Our granddaughter* and *We have two sons.* She saw them both—Ron and Dean—there in the window, but they ran into one another, fused. Which was which? My son, she said.

But when would Bill come? Bill, it doesn't matter if I'm not at the

house. I'm here. The house is where you're breathing. She laughed. It's you. Now came the morning bells from St. John's—passing into her. And she could hear children shouting somewhere below. Bill, I got to see where it takes me. Where? *Where?* she thought with terror and anxiety, feeling the intense sound inside her. What is it? For it grew, she palpitated with it, she could not bear it, could not bear the wait. Rapidly it grew, all sound now going through her, a sea of sound. *Bill, son,* she cried, striving to keep her eyes open and her ears keen, striving so she could tell them before she was lost in the sound.

For there it came. And with joy and terror, filled with the wonder of it, she wanted to tell them. It is this: I am dying, but there is the sound of bells. I am dying, but there are children on the beach.

Dream of the Toads

• **Matt Field**

Around the Pond
hylae shrill in transparent evenings,
embracing twigs
in wet fingers.

When the toads sing dreaming
"all questions" Thoreau said
"take a new aspect."
At the cairn, pilgrims

heap more rocks nervously.
Hurry and bring heavier objects
artifacts bricks morning papers
empty bottles.

Heap up microphones nightsticks
mace napalm and the charred
fusilage of an A-7 Corsair
to silence all questions.

Maybe the weight of words alone
can stop toads from singing;
maybe we can keep them down.
Hurry.

No End to It

• Dorothy M. Bryant

I don't see no end to it. I used to think by the time a man's fifty he seen everything. He's got a few things figured, you know. Like he gets peace and quiet to mow his lawn and have a couple of beers on a Sunday afternoon and watch the games on TV. That asking too much?

But everybody's going crazy. All upside down. My old lady says that's a sign I'm getting old, I can't keep up with the world. I tell her, it ain't like going to the beauty shop to get the latest hair style, like what's *in* this year. No. It's like, suppose you was playing a game, follow me? Learning, say, baseball. And you learn all the rules and you practice and you can hold your own pretty good. And then all of a sudden you go out there one day and everybody's doing something else, and you tell them, hey, you can't do it that way, that's against the rules. And they say, we didn't like them rules, so we're going to change them. And I figure, maybe they can change the rules, but then it's not baseball anymore. See what I mean? Never mind.

You take my son. When he's born I say to myself, you're a nobody with a fourth grade education, but your son is going to be somebody. Sure, I know, everybody says that the day his son is born. It's only natural to want something better for your kids. I start to think of all the things happened to me when I was a kid, all the crap I put up with, and I decide there's a long list of things my son ain't never going to have to see.

Like he's never going to be hungry. Or wear clothes two sizes too big so they last longer. And if someone say *rat* or *roach*, he's going to say, 'What's that?' " Or never share a bathroom, so you always know no matter how early you get in there, somebody already peed all over the seat. He's never going to start going down into the mines when he's twelve years old and start coughing his life away before he's thirty. And if he gets sick, I pick up the phone and call the doctor, right now, never mind the money. And he's not going to leave school and work for the rest of his life at some crummy job and never amount to anything. That was the big thing. Not only high school; you need a high school education just to dig a ditch. Right from the beginning, my old lady too, we was set on him going to college. That's why we only had the one, so we could do things for him.

You're going to say we spoiled him. Hell, we never could afford to spoil him. Things were rough after the war. We got out of that coal town and came here and I didn't even have a trade. Soon as I got into the plant, there was a strike and we were out six weeks. That was the first big fight my old lady and me had. She was afraid; she said I should scab; but I says no, in the long run that's no good, we got to stand up for decent wages and the safety precautions. I was right, she admits it now,

we got a health plan and all, but then it was rough; and I'll tell you one or two days there, Rick wasn't hungry, but me and the old lady was.

But we hung on and we got our conditions, and I started making pretty good money. Every time our contract came up, we pushed hard, and we did pretty good, for years, until automation and inflation and taxes and, well, that's another problem. I worked hard in the local and I never tried to get out of picket duty the way most of the other guys did. I figured it was for Rick, so that some day I'd be able to send him to college. All the time he was little, we was getting him ready. The old lady, she used to read to him all the time and even taught *him* to read a little before he started school. How do you like that, little kindergarten kid, the book bigger than he was, reading. We took a picture. I still carry it, see?

And all the time we keep telling him, you're going to go to college so you'll be somebody. You don't have to be a nobody like your father standing on a lousy assembly line all day, the noise so loud you can't hear yourself think, and nothing but this every day for the rest of your life. We started before he could even understand. So he never even thought to ask, do I want to go to college? He was going, just like breathing.

Once, when he was about sixteen, he gave us a little scare. His best friend quit school, got a job, bought a car, all that. But I fixed it. I got Rick on at the plant temporary for the summer. A few weeks was enough. He said one day, how do you stand it, Pop? But I don't think about it anymore, like serving a sentence, a day at a time. I got ten years till I retire, and I figure my son is never going to count off the years like this; so what else could I ask?

About that time my old lady goes to work. She says it'll be better to start saving ahead a little for Rick's college, and besides she doesn't know what to do with herself in the house anymore. So she takes up typing and gets a job in an office. Besides, prices are going up, and it's like no matter how much we get for a raise, it ain't enough to keep up with the inflation and we want to make sure there's enough money for Rick to stay in college so they won't take him in the army. That's another thing I don't want my son to see if he can help it; it wasn't like the old movies on TV.

There's no trouble getting him into college; he's right at the top of his class, he can take his pick. He wants to go back east to a place I never heard of, but he says it's very good, and he can make good connections there, so we send him. It should be good, it costs a mint, even with the scholarship he gets. Only thing is we can't keep paying plane fare for visits, so it gets lonely sometimes. At first everything is fine; the first year when he comes home for Christmas, he's going to major in business administration, and minor in English so he can go into advertising. I'm pretty proud of the kid. I take him everywhere that vacation, even to the plant, showing him off. It's like I just became a father again, passing out cigars and telling everyone what a fine son I got. He gets embarrassed. I think he's a little ashamed of me. Why shouldn't he? What am I? A nobody with a fourth grade education.

When he comes home in the summer, he wants to work at the plant to help out with his expenses. A good kid, you see, not spoiled. I look back

on that time now, like it was the Garden of Eden, the best time of my life; it seems like years ago.

The second year the trouble starts. Not all at once, just little things you don't notice. He comes home for Christmas, very quiet, reads a lot. Says he's not so sure he wants to be in business. And I say, so change your mind, you can be a doctor or a lawyer, anything you want, I'm not going to tell you. He gives me a funny look and says do I have to be a doctor or a lawyer. So I says well what do you want? And he just shrugs. I know something's bugging the kid, but he's not talking. His mother can't get nothing out of him either.

When he goes back to school, he starts writing these long letters; they don't make any sense, and I even wonder, Jesus, I hope he's not taking anything. One of the letters says maybe he wants to be a teacher, and I even swallow that. I tell my old lady, write back and tell him, sure, why not; it don't pay any better than I make on the line but it's clean work and plenty of vacation time. I wasn't trying to push the kid, you know? Then for a long time he don't write at all. We even call him a couple of times to see if he's all right, and he says, yeah, I'm all right, and that's all he says.

Come June, we go to the airport to meet him. I didn't know him. His mother almost passes out. You should see him. Hair down to here. Clothes like I wouldn't give to a tramp. I look at him and say what happened, somebody steal your money and your clothes? He just looks at me, and the old lady pokes me to shut up and act like it's nothing. And we go home and she's talking and laughing and Rick and me we just sit there and look at each other like across a gulch where it don't pay to talk because you're too far apart to hear what you're saying.

That night was bad. He goes to his room early and we sit up, me saying is this what we worked so hard for and my old lady saying what did we do wrong? That kind of stuff, you know. Don't get you no place. So we both decide we're going to pretend he don't look like a mangy lion. So next morning I ask him, casual, how's school? And he says, he don't want to go back. It's like another kick in the gut. His mother drops the coffee pot, and we're all jumping around making sure no one's burned and cleaning up the mess. Then we sit down again all quiet, real quiet.

I don't see any purpose to it, he says. I don't know what I want to do. Just go to school, his mother says, find out later what you want to do. They'll take you in the army, I says. No, they won't, he says, cool as ice. I won't go. That's all we need. His mother starts crying, and that drives me almost crazy and I start yelling, "Did I work my ass off all these years so I could have a convict for a son?" And that's all the talking for that day.

Next day he says when does he go to work in the plant like last summer. I just look at him; then I say, let me understand you, you intending to work this summer? He says, sure. I says, where? At the plant, he says, real slow, like I'm dumb. And just as slow I say, looking like that, I wouldn't take you to the plant, even if they'd hire you, which they won't. And that's all the talk for a whole week. His mother tells me he's out every day looking for a job.

At the end of the week I come

home from work and I hear the old lady singing in the kitchen. I walk in and she gives me a big kiss and she laughs. I figure he's finally driven her batty. Then she puts the food on the table, humming all the time, and she calls, Ricky, dinner's ready. And he comes out. Clipped. The beard is shaved off and his hair is short, well, not real short, a little dripping down his neck, but you can see his ears anyhow. I start to smile, but then I figure he'll think I'm crowing so I just say, you look good. And he says, you were right; I couldn't get a job. And I say, "I'll take you down to the plant Monday." And I think we all feel a lot better. He goes out with some of his old friends that night, and the old lady and me talk it over and decide we won't push him about school. It'll be like before, a few weeks in the plant and he'll be ready to go back to college.

So that's what we do for the next month, and everything's going pretty good. I notice he's talking a lot to the guys at the plant, very friendly, but he complains same as ever about the work, so I think everything's going to work out. Except sometimes I see guys looking at us kind of funny when we come in the locker room. Then this old guy, Mike, comes up to me one day and says, you know you better muzzle that kid of yours. What's the matter? Well, he says, the kid's going around to all the guys telling them the union ain't looking out for them, and they ought to run the plant themselves, and, you know, the kind of stuff I ain't heard much since the thirties, about the working classes and all. The guys don't like it, the shop steward don't like it, the foreman don't—That's enough, I tell him, I'll handle it.

So that night I tell him, what're you trying to do, lose me my job. And he starts all this stuff like Mike said, with new words like military-industrial complex, and we just start yelling at each other, me trying to make him see that talking to these guys about anything but bread-and-butter is stupid and even if he made sense they'd call him a red and it would just make trouble for me, and was this all he learned at college? Then we stop yelling finally, and there's the big silence again. This time it lasts for the rest of the summer. He don't bother anybody at the plant anymore. He's polite at the dinner table, and every night he goes out. And his mother just looks miserable all the time, and I want to wring his neck.

Come September, one night, he says, look, I think I know what I want to do. I don't want to go back east again, I told you. I've applied to the university here, right here. I've been accepted. I can live at home. If you can pay the fees, I'll pay for books and extras out of what I made this summer, and Mom can quit work. Right away the old lady's crying again and kissing him. I could almost kiss him myself. I go out and buy him an old Chevy so he can commute easier.

And that's what he does. He goes to the university and when I come home at night he's there at dinner, and his mother humming around again, and after dinner he goes to his room and we hear him typing or he's quiet studying. It's a lot cheaper, but the old lady don't quit her job because things are already looking bad at the plant with the new contract coming up and the company making tough noises, and we figure she should hang on till we see how it comes out. Besides, she says, I like

being out in the world where things are happening. "What would I do at home?" And I begin to relax, thinking everything's finally going to settle down. I'm thinking it was just a phase and he's all right again.

That's when the roof falls in. At first I don't know what's going on at that place except it sounds like a few jokers don't want to learn anything and don't want to let anyone else go to college. I say, if they don't like the school, they should quit and make room for others. Strike? They don't know the meaning of the word, and for what? They want to take over and tell the professors what to teach them. When I went to school, you kept your mouth shut and learned or else they threw you out. That's all. If you're so smart you can tell the teachers what to teach, you're too smart to need school.

So, now, there's no more humming in the kitchen, just a big argument every night. Sure, he's with the strikers, what else? And he's explaining to me, like I'm some dummy, how the college perpetuates the system, and how the people who get the diploma get in and the others are out. And I tell him, I'm a nobody with no education, but I didn't need two years of college to learn that; I knew it since before you were born, why do you think I work my ass off to get you through college? Maybe if you went hungry like me and had to stand on that assembly line all your life, you'd be glad to go to school. And he says, that's just the point. And I say, you're throwing away everything we did for you, your mother and me, you're saying shit on it, and he says that's not true. And his mother just cries. And that's the way it is every night. No end to it.

And the students call a strike. And he goes out every morning at six o'clock to picket. And at six o'clock at night his mother and me sit and wait to see if he's going to come home or if we're going to see him on the six o'clock news getting busted. And I don't say anything to her, but I'm scared because I remember how bad things can get when you get tough on scabs and the police get scared and—but every night he's home for dinner, in the big silence, what is there to say? and then he goes out to a meeting. I'm so mad I could kill him, and I'm scared someone else will.

But I ain't got trouble enough. Contract negotiations break down, and our union goes out. This time it looks real bad. The company won't budge; right from the beginning they're hard-nosed like they can hold out forever. And half our members whining 'cause they're afraid they'll miss a payment on their new car, instead of seeing the long range loss if we don't hang together now.

So there we are, and I wonder if things can get any worse. At least we talk a little now, like the day the police used mace on the campus. I seen worse in the old days, and I told Rick a few stories I'd forgotten myself. It wasn't all chanting and sign carrying then, but I didn't tell him about how sometimes we had to carry weapons on the picket line—all I need is to give him ideas! And my old lady, she just comes home from work and gives us dinner and goes to bed while Rick and me each go to our meetings. Once we're talking again I try to get Rick to be sensible. Like maybe he should transfer to another college and I should quit the plant and see if I can find something else. And he says, in the long run, that's no good. If you don't stand and fight

here, you just have to do it someplace else. Like he's been listening when I telephone the weak brothers at night and give them the old pep talk. And I don't see no end to it.

And I don't see how no good can come out of it. Except maybe what happened last week.

I was out on the picket line, as usual. It was raining, as usual; it always rains when I pull picket duty. And I was hunching up in my jacket, trying to sink my head in as far as I could and asking myself what kind of half-assed jerk I was, walking in the rain at my age, I'd probably die of pneumonia. And guys I never thought I'd see cross a picket line, going through.

Then I see Rick coming, and he's got about ten kids with him, three of them girls. He says, "Hi, Pop," to me and introduces all his friends, students from the university, strikers, and they all call me Sir and say how glad they are to know me, like good little kids when their mother says, be nice now and shake hands with your uncle, he's rich. Then Rick introduces them to the other pickets; he knows them all from last summer. Then he says to me, who's the picket captain, and I tell him, you know I am. And one of the other kids says, can you use us, Sir, we want to walk the line with you a while.

Well, I don't know how the other pickets are going to feel about these kids, they never had a good word for that strike, they say anybody can go to college has to have rocks in their heads to strike. But then old Mike, who's listening to all this with a funny smile on his face, says there's no rule against citizens joining a picket line, and we welcome any support we can get. So there we are with these ten kids mixed in. Pretty soon they start to talk and our younger pickets are flirting with the girls a little, and before you know it old Mike's teaching everybody to sing "Solidarity Forever." And I'm thinking, that's all we need, the next company press release will be about the conspiracy between us and anarchist students.

I manage to get next to Rick, and while we walk I ask him what's it all about? He says, when the kids heard about you being on strike they were impressed. I say, why? And he says, well, their parents are doctors and lawyers, white collar people. They don't know anything. He says how he told them some of the stories I told him at dinner, and since they found out he was the son of a working man, they really look up to him. And I try to get it straight, but we're always interrupted, one kid after another asking me questions about strike tactics, and liaison between the students and the working classes, and I laugh at their half-baked schemes but they ask why I'm laughing, and they sure listen hard when I tell them. After a couple of hours everybody's cold and wet and just walking, and I'll hand it to these kids, they probably never had to walk to the grocery store in their lives, but none of them complains or tries to leave; they just hunch up like me and keep walking.

And then Rick and me are together again and I shake my head and tell him, your friends are not too bad, at least they listen respectfully to your old man. And he looks at me with this big smile and says, why not, you have something to tell them. You're somebody.

We didn't talk at all anymore. Tell you the truth, I couldn't. I had this lump in my throat.

Which don't mean I agree with him. I still think the kid's crazy. So every day we go out and picket and at night we sit at the table and argue. The old lady goes to bed, and we're still sitting at the table yelling at each other.

Only last night she don't go to bed. She says something a couple of times, I don't really hear, and then she yells at me, something about going on strike. "Who?" I says. And she says, the girls at the office. I been trying to tell you but you never listen. What strike, I says, you're not even organized. And she says they're getting organized. And Rick says, how can you go out on strike, you're the sole support of the family now. Then she's really mad, and slams down a dish, and says, oh, you're so pure but you want me to scab.

Then she tells us how some of the younger women (they got college degrees and they're still behind a typewriter just like her) have been trying to organize because they make less money than the men and the men get promoted to the top jobs where they make even more money for doing nothing while the women still do all the work. She tells how she never would have got the job to help pay for Rick's education if she hadn't come cheaper than a man; so that means she's been a scab right along. And then, get this, she says she's tired of working hard all day and coming home to fix dinner for a couple of lazy bums who won't even dry a dish or pick up their dirty socks. I never seen her so mad. And she didn't cry either. She just gets up and puts her coat on. I ask her, "Where you going?" and she says to a meeting, and on the way out she slams the front door.

So Rick and me do the dishes, both of us saying nothing, and finally he says, she's right. I'm so tired I just nod my head.

Then after a while I tell him, you know what I think. I thing she's right. And I'm right. And you're right. And everybody's right. And I don't see no end to it.

Glendale

• **Burton L. Carlson**

Grandma Lane lived up the street.

Lantana bloomed
beside the porch.

Eucalyptus made evenings cool.

Snails made their homes in lantana
like birds in trees

or worms in apples
leaving trails.

Black ants farmed aphids.

Contributors

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